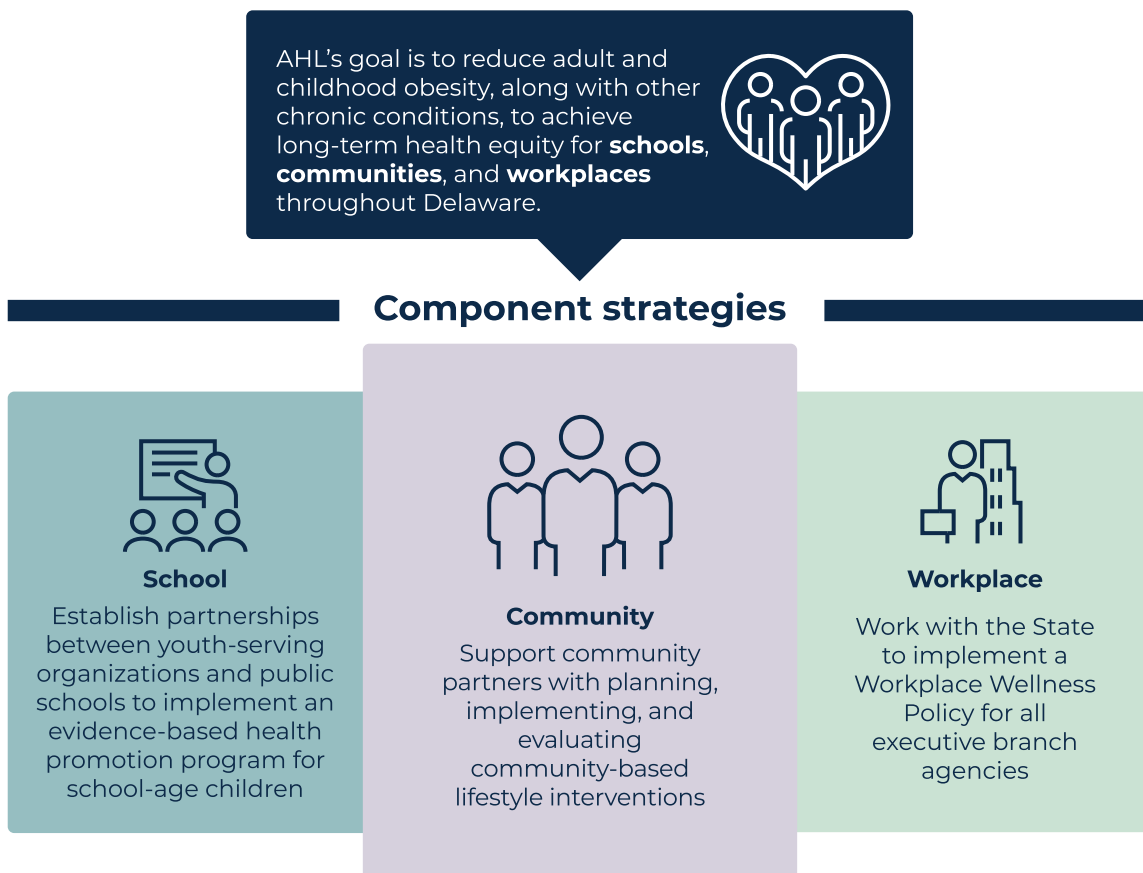


Focus on Community Partners

Background

Advancing Healthy Lifestyles: Chronic Disease, Health Equity, & COVID-19 (“Advancing Healthy Lifestyles” or “AHL”) is a statewide initiative launched in January 2021 by the Delaware Division of Public Health’s Physical Activity, Nutrition, and Obesity Prevention Program (PANO). DPH-PANO introduced the AHL initiative as COVID-19 exacerbated the health burdens already faced by many Delawareans. The goal of AHL is to reduce obesity and other chronic conditions to achieve health equity among all Delaware residents. Figure 1 shows AHL’s goal and the three components of its strategy. This brief, the second in a [series](#), focuses on the work of community partners.

Figure 1. Community is one of three strategic components to achieve AHL’s goal



Building the Capacity of Community Partners

AHL is working to prevent chronic disease and advance health equity by promoting health and supporting healthy behaviors. Community partners, with their ability to educate and conduct outreach in the community, are essential for carrying out this mission. Their programs focus on accessing healthy food, creating opportunities for physical activity, and finding ways to prevent and manage chronic diseases.

To achieve its goal, AHL is building the capacity of three community partners launching interven-

tions to promote healthy lifestyles: the American Lung Association (ALA), University of Delaware—Cooperative Extension (UD), and Delaware State University (DSU). Financial support and intensive technical assistance from AHL are helping these partners build capacity for planning, implementation, and program evaluation. The partners are developing detailed action plans that identify community needs, program participants, implementation staff, program activities, and how each program will adopt an equity-focus. Next, the partners develop evaluation and monitoring plans that map to key AHL outcomes. Each of the partners will collect data to document implementation progress.

Figure 2. AHL goals and community partner program outcomes



American Lung Association (ALA)

ALA is working with youth organizations, conducting needs assessments to identify priority programming for young children and teens that focuses on lung health, including asthma management and tobacco and vaping prevention and education. Initially, ALA sought to work primarily with school districts, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, schools lacked the capacity for additional programming. In response, ALA pivoted to working with youth organizations to meet community needs. Currently, ALA is working with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Seaford and Laurel in Western Sussex County — a county that ranks high in the state for asthma prevalence¹ — to assess their communities' key needs.

ALA sees this work as an opportunity to bring chronic disease prevention back into focus during the pandemic. Lung health, including asthma management and tobacco and vaping prevention, remains a critical need: people with asthma and people who smoke or use e-cigarettes are at a higher risk for complications from COVID-19, underscoring the importance of this work.

Focus on equity

Programming focuses on areas with high asthma burden, and the needs assessment focuses on

- ✓ Health disparities and social determinants of health
- ✓ Areas hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic

The program will continue to identify communities with high asthma rates as potential sites for improving lung health among Delaware youth.

Addressing community needs

“Looking at the sites... and the geographic areas, pediatric asthma rates are high. Kids in the program may have asthma and not be diagnosed yet. We want the staff to have the information to avoid triggers for asthma. Not only does it help kids live healthier lifestyles, but they are missing less school because their asthma is better managed and they [can] stay on grade level.”

John Keith, Director of Health Promotions, ALA



¹ Delaware Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Health Promotion and Disease Prevention. “The Burden of Asthma in Delaware.” Revised 2017. Available at <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/dpc/files/asthmaburdenupdate16.pdf>. Accessed January 31, 2022.



The University of Delaware Cooperative Extension (UD) and The Delaware Council on Farm and Food Policy

The team is working with community-based partners, food producers and distributors, and local retail sites to promote equitable access to healthy, locally produced food. In the first program year, The team is engaging two pilot communities, Harrington and Dover, which have a high percentage of residents who are low-income and speak a language other than English. During the pilot, the program team hopes to gauge how food producers and retailers provide access to foods that meet community members' needs and improve access to healthy foods in retail sites in the communities. The team is first conducting a statewide needs assessment to learn more about how and where Delawareans shop for food, and whether retail locations sell the healthy food that residents want to buy.

After the pilot, the program will review the lessons learned and incorporate them into broader implementation efforts across the state. The long-term goal

Focus on equity

The team has embedded equity into every step of program development, including:

- ✓ Establishing an initiative intended to meet the needs of low-income Delaware residents
- ✓ Inclusive planning process that integrates diverse community partners and other stakeholders' input
- ✓ Sourcing from farms and businesses whose owners are Black, Indigenous, and people of color
- ✓ Using policy and systems change to promote lasting improvements to community development, and equitable food systems

of the program is to improve access to healthy foods and food security for Delawareans by increasing the number of sites that provide fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods.

Early survey responses identified three key issues as factors that determine how and where residents prefer to shop:

- / **Store location and convenience**
- / **Perceived affordability of food**
- / **Welcoming environment, including cleanliness, friendliness of staff, and an appealing produce section**

Including community voices

"The idea that utilizing community voices to inform changing consumer needs- it's what's driving this. We've got a changing landscape around food."

Gina Crist, Community Health Specialist, UD

"We are trying to connect the consumer and retail to benefit both. The pandemic has had a significant impact on how Delawareans access their food, and this initiative helps us to take actionable steps."

Nikko Brady, Deputy Principal Assistant, Delaware Department of Agriculture



Delaware State University (DSU)

The Biomedical, Behavioral and Allied Health Center at DSU is a new partner in the AHL Initiative. In collaboration with First State Community Action and the Delaware State Police Community Outreach Program, DSU is planning a no-cost, half-day summer program for children ages 6 to 12 living in the Capitol Park development in Dover, a neighborhood that is mostly low-income. The goal of the program is to provide a safe space for kids to learn, play, and offer access to healthy snacks. Children from low-income families face much larger learning disparities than those from higher-income families, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made this situation worse. The summer program will include outdoor activities, educational support, and healthy snacks. Slated for summer 2022, the program plans to expand to after-school programming in the fall.



Focus on equity

This program aims to bridge gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic to provide youth:

- ✓ Access to physical activity
- ✓ Healthy snacks

Program staff will use snack time to talk about healthy eating and how nutritious food can improve learning, enhance sleep, and fuel growing bodies. Young people will benefit from learning activities and positive social interaction with peers.

Building healthy habits

“Talking to members of the community, one thing that came up was the need for youth programming. We want to work with kids to help build healthy habits. Children that eat healthier diets will have better focus and participation in school; healthier food can reduce the risk of long-term chronic health conditions in adulthood, like diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure.”

Cynthia Newton, Director of Partnerships and Programs for Biomedical, Behavioral, and Allied Health Center, DSU

This brief was prepared on behalf of the AHL Initiative by Mathematica, the contractor supporting AHL's work in the areas of workplace and community capacity. Mathematica partners with Concept Systems Inc., which led the statewide action plan and is supporting the school-community partnership demonstration.